

RESURRECTING THE BIBLE:  
TOWARDS A DIALOGICAL BIBLE STUDY MODEL  
USING HISTORICAL CRITICAL AND EXPERIENTIAL METHODOLOGIES

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## ABSTRACT

Recognizing the prevalent lack of biblical knowledge and understanding within most of liberal Protestant Christianity, the need was seen for developing a Bible study model which would assist in overcoming the present problem. The model proposed was built upon the insights of Walter Wink, James D. Smart and others, who stressed the need for both historical critical study and existential interpretation within the same Bible study model. The model developed further utilized experiential learning methodologies to make biblical insights relevant, contemporary, and understandable for lay persons. An example of the "Dia-logical" method based on the "Raising of Lazarus" story (John 11:1-44) was included for use with a group of laity using a weekend retreat setting. The model presented included an exegesis of the passage, group exercises, and instructions for the group leader. The paper also reviewed and evaluated some currently used Bible study models.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH

#### *The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy*

There is a crisis developing within the Christian community that potentially threatens both the Church's foundation, as well as the very core of Christian existence. It is a problem that affects all of Church life and knows no social, economic, or ethnic barriers. It affects the young as profoundly as it affects the mature. The crisis alluded to is the modern Christian's pervasive ignorance of the Bible. No longer do Christians either know or understand what the Bible says. An awareness of the current situation prompted biblical scholar James D. Smart to remark:

The voice of the Scriptures is falling silent in the preaching and teaching of the Church and in the consciousness of Christian people, a silence that is perceptible even among those who are<sup>1</sup> most insistent upon their devotion to the Scriptures.

In our surprise to such a statement we may ask, "How is that possible?" Christians no doubt generally know more about the world than ever before. The Bible is certainly more available and affordable than ever before. Most, if not all churches, have some form of Christian education program for children through adults. Biblical scholarship and

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<sup>1</sup>James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p.15.

study materials are in abundance. But what has caused the present lack of knowledge of the Bible? To answer this simple but profound question, the insights of James D. Smart and Walter Wink, two biblical scholars particularly sensitive to the present problem, will be presented.

In his volume, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, James D. Smart summarized several reasons why the Bible is becoming "silent" in the churches.<sup>2</sup> The first reason, he saw, why the voice of Scripture has fallen silent in churches is due to the great cultural-historical gap that has been created between the age of the biblical authors and our own. The general growth of knowledge, human self-understanding, and of an understanding of history has been so great, between us and the biblical writers, that the unassisted reader can no longer fully understand what he reads. The Bible is thus, a product of an age we can no longer easily relate to.

Second, in spite of the great wealth of biblical knowledge generated over the past century, this knowledge has not yet filtered down to the local church level. Thus, the knowledge that would enable persons to more fully understand the Bible is not readily available to them. Smart poignantly remarked that "...the membership of the Church to a very large extent has been allowed so far as the Bible

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

is concerned to remain far into the twentieth century at a level of knowledge which would be more appropriate to the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Though Smart cited no specific reasons why the vast riches of biblical scholarship has failed to make an impact on the Church membership, he no doubt was aware of the great theological struggle in the Church between biblical literalists and those favoring the historical critical method. This great struggle was certainly the background for John Knox's excellent work *Criticism and Faith*, where Knox carefully tried to show that historical criticism was not dialectically opposed to Christian belief and faith.<sup>4</sup>

A third reason, Smart saw, for the Bible's disuse in the Church today reflects another struggle within biblical scholarship itself. What Smart referred to was the refusal on the part of American biblical scholars, to take account of both theological as well as historical content when dealing with Scripture. Over against a movement in European scholarship which sought to grapple with theological implications, American scholarship was fearful that dealing with theological issues would undermine scholarship's claim to scientific objectivity. As Smart said:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>4</sup>John Knox, *Criticism and Faith* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952).

They would agree with Krister Stendahl that their discipline is a descriptive science that has completed its task when it has defined what the text of Scripture *meant* but has no responsibility in relation to what the text *means*.<sup>5</sup>

While resistance to theological investigation may no longer be dominant among American scholars, the concern for it to remain scientifically objective at all times, undoubtedly made an impact on those that turn to scholarship for answers to biblical questions. Scholarship's bias towards theological issues was transferred over to ministers trained in exegesis and therefore to local congregations. Smart insisted that scholarship's decision to deal only with issues which could be studied objectively, unintentionally alienated persons from the Bible, while at the same time provided new biblical insights and understandings. By trying to maintain its scientific character in its analysis of the literature and the reconstruction of history and religion, biblical scholarship neglected the theological meaning which makes the Bible relevant to the modern reader. It is this point of scholarship's overconcern with objectivity that Walter Wink found most disturbing.

In his book, *The Bible in Human Transformation*, Wink was critical of historical biblical criticism's inability to achieve its purpose, namely to interpret the

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<sup>5</sup>Smart, p. 63, citing Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I. 418-432.

Scriptures so that the past becomes alive and gives meaning for our present lives.<sup>6</sup> So strong was his criticism, that he began his book with the abrupt statement: "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."<sup>7</sup> Wink's argument against historical criticism was centered around two issues. He first pointed out that historical criticism, based as it was on the methodology of scientific objectivism and rationalism, distanced the Bible by making it an "object". The end result has been that the Bible was so objectified by the critical method that it is now alienated from today's Christians. In Wink's words:

By detaching the text from the stream of my existence, biblical criticism has hurled it into an abyss of an objectified past. Such a past is an infinite regress. No amount of devoted study can bring it back.<sup>8</sup>

By thus keeping a text at a distance, we are only allowed to see it in its historical-cultural setting. This distancing prevents any text from speaking to us in our own existence, that is, it prevents a text from speaking at all. For Wink, the historical critical method, "...has reduced the Bible to a dead letter."<sup>9</sup>

Wink's second criticism of the historical critical method was that it made a false claim to scientific objec-

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 1.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 4.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid.

tivity, indeed it was and continues to be subjective and historically conditioned.<sup>10</sup> It is based upon a "Western" cultural technological world view which is characterized by a valuing of reason and objectivity, over against emotions and subjective experience. It is true that historical critical scholars do acknowledge that the biblical writers held a variety of world views, but scholarship's mistake was to maintain that only the present modern world view is ultimately the correct one. Wink was aware that something more than pure honesty and objectivity was at the foundation of the historical critical method. Wink saw, among other things, that by imposing our own world view on biblical texts we are really trying to show how the past culminated and progressed to the present modern age.<sup>11</sup> Implicitly the Bible is, therefore, perceived as outdated and not as relevant to us as current insights and understandings. In effect, it is relegated to the past as a curiosity, something interesting but no longer important.

The lack of biblical knowledge is probably due to other reasons than those just given. For one, there was a time when the Bible was nearly the only book easily available. Not only was it read often but it was used as the text for learning basic reading skills in school. Today there are thousands of books accessible. There has also

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

been the profound impact of radio and television in America. More than any other media, television today occupies much of a typical person's leisure time. A recent Church newsletter<sup>12</sup> cited statistics from a Christian educators' workshop which revealed that the average youth, by the time he or she had graduated from high school, will probably have watched an average of 15,000 hours of television. When this is compared with the probable maximum of 52 hours per year spent in a Christian education setting, is there little wonder why the Bible is a stranger to the young?

For all the possible reasons which may be proposed for the present lack of biblical knowledge, what is central to the critiques of Smart and Wink is that the historical critical method itself has been, to a large degree, responsible for the current ignorance of the Bible. They both assert that the method itself, unintentionally or otherwise, has distanced and alienated the Bible from persons. Aside from their philosophical and theoretical arguments against the historical critical method, one can also quickly see some very practical reasons why Bible study based on historical criticism often fails to be effective.

The methods and techniques of historical criticism are complex, time-consuming and not always appealing or easily mastered by the average Christian. Too quickly,

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XXIII:3<sup>12</sup>The Los Altos United Methodist Church, "Newsletter", (February 3, 1976).

Bible study is relegated to the "expert", the biblical scholar, minister, or skilled lay worker. The typical Christian is left to choose between reading and listening to "experts" for proper biblical understanding, or giving up Bible study entirely. But even when an expert may be available, which is often not the case, the task of transferring this expert's knowledge to a group of others is formidable. Since so much time is necessarily devoted to the important historical details of a passage, a group leader may run out of time before dealing with the important questions as to what the text means for our lives. The end result is too often a boring and meaningless discussion of historical trivia. What is needed is both a theoretical and practical model of Bible study which would make study of the Bible exciting and meaningful. But before such a model may be developed we must ask ourselves an important question, namely, why study the Bible at all?

### *The Bible's Authority*

The question of the Bible's value and worth has traditionally been addressed under the heading of the Bible's "authority." That is, why is the Bible the authoritative word of God for persons today? What importance does it have for me? Discerning the Bible's authority however is complex and difficult, but a task that must be attempted before developing any model of Bible study. Since theories

as to the Bible's authority are as varied as Christian theologies, no attempt will be made to give an exhaustive survey of this issue, but will be rather content to examine three different approaches. These approaches will thus present different possibilities for answering the authority question. The three views summarized will be that of John Knox, James Smart, and that of the New Hermeneutic as characterized by Ernest Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling.

John Knox lauds the Bible as the most important book in our Western tradition which is "absolutely indispensable and supremely significant for the Church and for all mankind, and the very bread of the soul."<sup>13</sup> To see why this is so, we must examine Knox's theology.

Knox sees the distinctive and central element of the Christian faith embodied in the belief that "God supremely revealed himself in Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Christian Church has always been deeply and inextricably concerned with a historical event, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Knox says: "When the Church loses contact with the event, it has lost contact with the source and norm of its own true life; it has ceased to be the Church."<sup>15</sup> For Knox, the Bible's authority is derived from its proximity to the event of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the event of Jesus that has the only true

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<sup>13</sup>Knox, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 24. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.62.

authority for the Christian Church, and our knowledge of this pivotal event can only be known through the writings of the primitive Christian community.<sup>16</sup> "To be in touch with the most authentic life of the primitive Church is to be in touch with the original event--the most direct touch we can have."<sup>17</sup> But Knox is careful to make the distinction between the Bible as witness to the revelation, from the concept that the Bible itself is the revelation. For Knox: "The event is the important thing, not the account; and we must interpret the account to recover the event."<sup>18</sup>

The two strengths of Knox's position are his clearly acknowledged need for historical understanding and interpretation of a text, and his insistence that only the event of Jesus is authoritative and not the account of the event. Knox, however, fails to adequately take account of the possibility that the biblical writers themselves may have been mistaken and wrote inaccurate portrayals of the original event. He seems to assume that the biblical writers were accurate witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Another weak point in Knox's discussion is that he relegates all authority to an event in the past and seems to be unconcerned with the reality of the work of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

James D. Smart sees the authority of the Bible as grounded on God himself. It was God's authority that Jesus, the Apostles and the biblical writers responded to and person's today must make God their only authority as well.<sup>19</sup> The Bible is valuable because through it we become aware of how the biblical writers were responding to God's authority. By studying the Bible we may also learn how to respond to God's authority. In this way we may listen to His word within us.<sup>20</sup> Through it, we may listen for the word of God which brings life to fulfillment.<sup>21</sup> God's revelation, then, was present for a biblical writer, as God's presence with him in the midst of his history, "illumining his life situation, setting him free from his past, and opening before him a future."<sup>22</sup>

For Smart, as with Knox, the Bible is witness to the revelation, but not the revelation itself. The primary difference between Knox and Smart centers around the source of the revelation. For Knox it is Jesus, for Smart it is God. In this way it can be seen that Smart emphasizes the present action of God in our lives today, where Knox looks back to the event of Jesus of Nazareth. Smart is more conscious of the risen Lord than Knox appears to be. It is because of the continuing presence of the risen Lord throughout history that makes the Bible essential for Smart. This

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<sup>19</sup> Smart, p. 98. <sup>20</sup> Ibid. <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 106. <sup>22</sup> Ibid.p.104.

living presence is the reality of the Christian revelation and is sustained, for Smart, only as the Church remembers its tradition which brought it into being. That tradition is the witness of the early Church, the Bible. For Smart, "No Scriptures, no church! No Scriptures, no revelation."<sup>23</sup>

Smart's strength is his sensitivity to the essential role of the continuing presence of God's word with us. It is God's authority alone that we respond to as did those before us. In this respect, Christians of all ages are alike. Smart gets into difficulty because he is not clear as to how the present word of God comes to us as revelation, when interpreting a text. He seems to say only that the revelation can be mediated through Scripture but evidently leaves it up to the work of the risen Lord or Holy Spirit to make revelation happen. Smart also fails to clearly differentiate between our ability to respond to God's authority as did Jesus, and our response to the authority of Christ the Risen Lord. He seems on the one hand, to say that there is a difference between the authority of God and of Christ when he says Jesus himself responded to God's authority. On the other hand he says, the living presence of Christ sustained the Church. Smart could have been more systematic in developing his Christology.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

"Hermeneutics" is the study of how we can glean meaning for today from any text or Scripture. It is the study of how we may bridge the gap between the meaning a text had for its author and intended readers, and the meaning a text has for us.<sup>24</sup> The "New Hermeneutic" is an approach to the interpretive task, based on the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger and developed most notably by Ernest Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. The central feature of the New Hermeneutic's approach is its understanding of the nature and use of language. The claim made is that language is the key to understanding human nature and the relationship between God and humans.<sup>25</sup>

Language, for the New Hermeneutic, is at the very foundation of human experience. It is one of the major instruments which shapes and orders the world about us, by assigning meaning to the world and thus making existence understandable.<sup>26</sup> As Achtemeier has said:

...Language does not arise when one person wants to communicate the meaning of his life, or of some event in that life, to another. Rather, language is the response to an event by means of which the man who confronts it seeks to understand the event and to fit it into his world so that it may continue to function as event, and as reality, for him. Language is thus born in the attempt to understand, to 'interpret' (to oneself and others), the meaning of human life, of existence.<sup>27</sup>

The connection between language and event is so intimate that

<sup>24</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 5. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78f. <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

one can speak of any event as a "word-event." That is, language and event are born together. For an event to exist for persons, it needs the words or language the event calls forth. In this way, language actually illuminates the reality that brings it forth.<sup>28</sup> Fuchs argues that not only does language illuminate the reality of an event, but that all reality is determined by language and is a function of language.<sup>29</sup> Putting it another way, one could say that for reality to function as reality for man, it must be understood as reality, yet it is equally obvious to say that understanding happens only by means of language. As a result, "Apart from language, there is no reality, at least none that would function as such for man."<sup>30</sup> In this way, it can be seen that language, true language properly functioning to illuminate reality and existence, is more than information about an event. Language itself both reflects and participates in the reality of any event.

Since the task of human life is to understand and construct a meaningful existence, language thus reflects any attempt to comprehend life and existence. Past language, therefore, shows how human existence has been understood in the past. It shows the way a people have come to develop an

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91.      <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>30</sup>Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* (Bad Cannstatt: Müllerschön, 1963), p. 126ff.

understanding of themselves and their world, ordering the language and thus their world, in the light of their past experience.<sup>31</sup> Since God is the creative source of all meaning and existence in the Christian perspective, language, especially biblical language, shows the way a people have experienced and understood their relationship with God. Knowing this becomes important when speaking of doing the hermeneutic task of interpreting biblical writings in order to uncover their present meaning.

Because language is an interpretation of the meaning of human existence by examining, studying and allowing language to say what it has to say, we may see what that particular interpretation of reality, of existence, was trying to make clear. In this way, study of any language is not complete until its meaning for my existence has been determined.<sup>32</sup> The way this occurs is for the person to be in dialogue with the text. By asking questions of a text, the text reveals to us its meaning. This in turn, causes us to refine our questions, which then leads to new revelations from the text. This dialogue between questioner and text is what Martin Heidegger first termed the "Hermeneutical circle."<sup>33</sup>

Since the New Testament is more a proclamation of the Christian faith than a record of historical events, the

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<sup>31</sup> Achtemeier, p. 91.   <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 97   <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

intention of that proclamation is to put a person before a decision of faith.<sup>34</sup> "That is, the text challenges a person to see things in relation to God the way Jesus saw them, and to act accordingly.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the text aims to interpret human existence in a specific way, namely in the light of Jesus and the way he interpreted it. As Fuchs says: "That in turn will mean that the New Testament cannot be understood apart from categories that are related to human existence. Indeed, to really understand the proclamation, i.e., to confront the decision, one must allow one's own existence to be challenged. Interpretation, therefore, must take place in the interpreter himself, and his life."<sup>36</sup> A biblical text, thus, points to God as the basis of human existence. It wants to show that persons are dependent on God for the source of ultimate meaning and personal security. Any other basis for human existence is false and untrustworthy. The decision thus called for is a decision of "faith", a decision to accept life as a gift and to give up our own self-assertive attempts to try and provide meaning for one's own life. As Achtemeier said: "It is a decision to live in the present as a time of love."<sup>37</sup> The significance of Jesus was that he announced the time of God's love, an arrival that faith accepts and can now see.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Achtemeier, p. 121. <sup>35</sup> Ibid. <sup>36</sup> Fuchs, p. 122.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 106. <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

The New Hermeneutic has many strengths. The most important, for present purposes, is its clarity on the way in which a text embodies meaning for us today. As an interpretation of human existence, a text gives access to that understanding by our questioning of it. Through a text, we may come to understand what existence can mean to us. A New Testament text therefore challenges us to make a decision of faith. It asks us the question whether or not we will see reality as Jesus saw it, namely, in the knowledge of God's supremacy over our lives.

The weaknesses of the New Hermeneutic are subtle but important. Aside from being very abstract and therefore not an approach easily understood by lay persons, the New Hermeneutic runs into difficulty concerning the historicity of existence. Achtemeier sees in the New Hermeneutic an attempt to defend a view of faith based on some parts of the New Testament from a view of faith based on other portions. The view of faith rejected is that God can be at work "causing" certain historical "effects" - such as the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is to think mythologically and is no longer possible for moderns. The view of faith accepted is the demythologized one, the one supposedly the New Testament writers held in their best moments. It is the view of faith that rests not on objective information about history, Jesus, or the future, but the one that rests alone on God's grace as commu-

nicated through Jesus. True faith is not concerned about objective proof but is only concerned with understanding personal existence in the light of God. The weakness of the New Hermeneutic is that there is an implied denial of the historicity of human existence. This approach assumes that existence is unchangeable throughout the ages. This certainly denies Smart's statement that one of the very reasons why the biblical text no longer speaks to us, is precisely because of the great intellectual and theological gap between us and the biblical writers. It would seem more reasonable to acknowledge language's role in interpreting existence while allowing existence itself to be somewhat historically conditioned. However this weakness of the New Hermeneutic may be overcome, Achtemeier affirmed that faith as a way of meeting life must be taken seriously.

The intent of the preceding discussion has been to present three different ways in which the authority of the Bible has been treated. This author prefers the approach of the New Hermeneutic and that of Smart over against that of Knox, because proximity to an event does not in itself guarantee a truthful representation of that event. The question over who is right, however, is not really the present concern, since there is no common agreement between the various scholars and theologians. Each approach has its strengths as well as weaknesses. The intent has been to show different ways of perceiving the Bible as authori-

tative, ways that are valuable for different reasons. That it is authoritative there is little doubt, but how it is regarded as authoritative differs. With this background in mind, the discussion can now turn to the issue central to this paper, namely, how the Bible should be studied. While Knox, Smart and the advocates of the New Hermeneutic do not agree on how to understand the Bible's authority, they do agree on how to study the Bible. For this reason, these same authors are important for the following discussion.

## CHAPTER II

## THE NECESSARY ELEMENTS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Thus far, two important points have been made. The first is that the Bible is not presently being seriously studied in much of the Protestant Churches in America, and that this presents a serious problem for the modern Church. Secondly, the Bible is valuable and authoritative for the modern Christian, and the Church should re-emphasize the need and importance of disciplined Bible study. But how should Christians study and learn about the Bible? What methodology should the Church employ to educate its members about the biblical material? The rest of this paper will attempt to answer these two questions.

## CURRENT BIBLE STUDY NEEDS

It will be remembered that the analysis of James D. Smart gives three reasons why the Bible is no longer effectively studied in the Church today. The first is that because of the great cultural historical gap created between the biblical writers and us today, we can no longer easily understand the Bible. Secondly, the great amount of biblical knowledge generated in the last century by biblical scholars has not filtered down to the local Church level. Finally, Smart along with Walter Winksees in historical critical scholarship a concern for objectivity that has

effectively alienated the Bible from persons today. This latter point concerning the role of historical critical scholarship needs to be developed more fully. It is clear from the previous discussion that Wink, Smart and Knox view historical-critical scholarship negatively because of its over-concern with scientific objectivity. This often resulted in making the Bible an "object," which was alien, foreign, and meaningless for most persons today. But that is only one side of the issue. In fact, all three writers heavily endorse the use of historical critical methods and scholarship.

#### *The Need for Historical Criticism*

It will be remembered that for John Knox, Christianity has been centrally shaped about the event of Jesus Christ. "Christianity, then, is by definition a religion for which history is of supreme concern; a historical event is indeed the very source and center of it."<sup>1</sup> Knox thus endorses the historical critical method because it is needed to recover as much as possible the historical event of Jesus Christ. Knox gives four reasons why historical criticism is needed. First, it is needed to establish the event in its true and distinctive integrity. Second, it helps

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<sup>1</sup>John Knox, *Criticism and Faith* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 25.

us recover the original event by determining the various factors which created it and the various stages in its development which enables us to sense the dynamic character of the event and the inner complexity of the event. Third, historical criticism validates the event as event by rooting the event firmly in history; that is, we can speak of the quality of an event and not just the objective happening of the event in history. Finally, it enables the Church to imaginatively grasp the event vividly and concretely.<sup>2</sup> For Knox, historical criticism is actually essential to faith and not opposed to it because the object of faith is a historical event. To show that criticism is not opposed to faith, is in fact the intent of Knox's book, *Criticism and Faith*.

James Smart, as we recall, sees God as the ultimate authority that Jesus himself responded to, and the one to whom we must respond. Smart also fully embraces historical methodology so as to establish a continuity, yet more an identity, with the world of the Bible and our day-to-day world. Smart would have us enter imaginatively into the events of Jesus' ministry and into the struggle of the early Church. The story of the birth of Christianity has to become our story, he says, more than the events of our life

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 79ff.

today.<sup>3</sup> The only way that can happen is to establish a continuity with the biblical world by using the methodology of historical criticism. In Smart's own words: "The neglect of Biblical and post-Biblical history, however, destroys the continuity and allows the stage on which the Biblical drama is acted out to take on an atmosphere of unreality."<sup>4</sup> Only by establishing continuity with the world of the biblical writers, may we overcome the historical cultural gap that exists between them and us.

Walter Wink is more critical of the historical critical method than either Knox or Smart, but yet he also affirms the need for the continued use of historical criticism. Wink's critique of historical criticism in fact is more a critique of its distancing and objectifying of the Bible than it is an attack on critical method as such. Indeed, Wink says "...Christianity needed and still needs the acid bath of criticism."<sup>5</sup> But while seeing the need for criticism, Wink cautions against using criticism in the same way it has been used in the past. Historical criticism must be put under "new management,"<sup>6</sup> Wink states; a management which will overcome the subject-object distance

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<sup>3</sup>James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

which alienates the interpreter from the text.<sup>7</sup> Just exactly what this "new management" is, will be brought out later.

With respect to the approach of the New Hermeneutic, it only needs to be said that, following Rudolph Bultmann, it also fully approves of using all the tools of critical scholarship. Only by using these historical tools may an interpreter gain true insight into the way a particular biblical writer understood existence. Only by exposing the language of a text to the scrutiny of historical insights, will it ever yield up its meaning for us today.

What we have thus seen is a profound respect for the insights gained through the method of historical criticism. Only with the full gamut of historical critical methodology can persons hope to make any sense out of the biblical material. Failure to use critical methodology leaves a would-be interpreter only two choices, either to indulge in a literalistic, possibly mythological interpretation of Scripture, inconsistent with a twentieth century world view, or to let the Bible recede back into the veiled mystery of an age past, no longer of any real meaning or value for persons today. Supporting the authors cited, it is this author's opinion that historical critical methods, insights and understandings must be fully incorporated into any viable Bible study model. Any less would do a disservice

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

to the text on the one hand and to the interpreter on the other.

The question must be asked, however, whether historical criticism is all that is necessary for meaningful Bible study. Walter Wink quite clearly says that historical criticism is "bankrupt" and is no longer able to interpret a text fully to persons today. Knox, and Smart, too, see problems with the scholarly overconcern with being scientifically objective, but it is questionable whether Knox and Smart view historical criticism as metaphysically unable to make the Bible meaningful and relevant. They certainly see the problem of being overly concerned about maintaining one's "objectivity," but is that a problem of the method itself or of the way it has been historically used in the recent past? The latter seems closer to the truth since it has clearly been historical criticism's intent to make the Bible meaningful, or why else would the method have been developed? It would seem, therefore, that Wink has overstated his case against historical criticism somewhat by saying that the method itself is at fault. A more proper criticism, it would seem, would be to say that up until now the historical critical method has not properly addressed itself to the questions of contemporary interpretation. This has happened historically, yes, but this is not to say that historical critical method is unable or opposed to addressing itself to the questions of what a text means today.

The problem would seem to center on the practitioners of the method and not on the method itself.

*The Need for Existential Interpretation*

Whether one agrees with the above conclusion or not, the situation remains essentially unchanged, namely that Bible study must address itself to the questions of contemporary meaning. All of the previous authors agree on this point.

Reflecting on scholarship's preoccupation with scientific objectivity, John Knox sees the need for insights and understandings based on subjective grounds, as well as historical ones. He is aware that maintaining an objective stance escapes some types of error of interpretation, but he notes a growing awareness among scholars that in their objectivity "...one also misses the chance for really knowing the truth. For history, the object of the historian's study is itself a compound of fact and meaning."<sup>8</sup>

Knox goes on to say that: "The historian must not only be critical, he must be creative. He must not only 'get down' to the facts of his subject. He must also reach up to its meaning."<sup>9</sup> For Knox, then, the need is seen for subjective appraisal of a text, and not only evaluation of

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<sup>8</sup>Knox, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

historical facts.

James Smart emphasizes the need for establishing a continuity between the world of the Bible and our own. He would have us make the story of Christianity our own story, essential to our present lives.<sup>10</sup> Smart supports the commonalities between Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann who both tried to revise thought on how to interpret a text. As Smart realizes, both Barth and Bultmann recognize the value in the subjective involvement of the interpreter. As Smart says: "In short, what the interpreter brings with him to the text can be the source not just of misunderstandings but also of his profoundest understanding."<sup>11</sup>

Since the New Hermeneutic is largely dependent upon the work of Bultmann it is natural that it reflects similar views. Like Bultmann, the New Hermeneutic is concerned with what understanding a text has of existence, so that the modern reader can discern what meaning it has for his or her present existence. This concern over the meaning of life and of personal existence opens interpretation to the subjective experience of the interpreter. Thus, for the New Hermeneutic, like Knox, Smart, and Wink, subjective experience and interpretation are essential for a proper understanding of any text. "The objective (i.e. non-involved) viewpoint, cultivated by the natural scientists, will guar-

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<sup>10</sup>Smart, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

antee only that the historical material will *not* be understood."<sup>12</sup> The New Hermeneutic even goes so far as to say that the most objective translation of meaning about a text will be the most subjective. "This personal involvement in the historical material under consideration is the 'fundamental presupposition' for understanding history, and that means that the most 'objective' interpretation, i.e., that which best understands and transmits the meaning, of a historical text is the most 'subjective', i.e., the one most involved in the matters with which the text is dealing."<sup>13</sup> This is just another way of saying that for Scripture to come alive, it must address the existential questions of our lives. The text must reach out to us in our present need. To do this, we must participate in the interpretive process by asking of the text the existential questions that illuminate our own existence. We will learn the most from a text if we let it address our lives as we experience them. It is this entering into a dialogue with a text where we ask questions of it and let it ask questions of us, that Wink sees as the "new management" under which historical criticism must operate. In this way, the alienating tendency may be overcome.

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<sup>12</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 61.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

*Summary*

The discussion, thus far, on the role of historical criticism and existential interpretation in Bible study has lead to two conclusions. First, historical criticism is absolutely essential for any viable model of Bible study. It is the only method that can illumine the historical nature and background of Scripture. Without it, we cannot fully understand the Bible and are in danger of interpreting it either mythically or literalistically. Second, existential interpretation or the application of the meaning of a text to our lives must be made. Without it the Bible remains only a historical relic of our past, meaningless and unimportant to our present existence. The Bible lives only as it addresses and speaks to our own lives. It emerged in history as an interpretation of existence in the light of the event of Jesus Christ, and it continues to live in us today only as it addresses our lives in the light of that same experience.

The model of Bible study resulting from the interplay between historical understandings and existential interpretation is a dialogic one. It is dialogic in that it is a dialogue between the biblical narrative and ourselves. On the one hand, we look back to the historical event and ascertain its significance and meaning on a historical level. That understanding then illuminates our understanding of what the

biblical material is trying to say. On the other hand, we look to our own present lives and gain insight into how we presently understand life in all its fullness. In essence, we dialogue with ourselves, looking inward to discover what we already believe to be true. As we look to our own lives, the biblical text then informs, corrects, and redirects our own present beliefs concerning the nature of reality. At the same time, as we examine and understand our own lives better, we gain new insights into the biblical material and the Bible takes on new meaning for us. As this occurs, we gain new knowledge of ourselves and the way we understand our lives. This in turn leads to additional discoveries about the text being studied. In this way, the dialogue continues between text and interpreter, each informing and illuminating the reality of the other. The process is akin to the "hermeneutic circle" referred to earlier.

Bible study that exclusively deals with either historical critical or existential study of the Bible, truncates the dialogue and creates a monologue. It effectively allows only part of the truth from being learned. Any viable Bible study model needs both the historical and existential existing side by side. Each informs the other and cannot exist completely alone. With this in mind, let us now see how some contemporary models of Bible study are structured. The models presented are not inclusive of all types, but are believed to be representative of models

currently being employed at the local church level.

#### CURRENT BIBLE STUDY METHODS

##### *"Inductive" Bible Study*

A very useful and valuable method providing insight into Scripture has been developed by Don Williams and is called "Inductive" Bible study.<sup>14</sup> He termed his approach "Inductive" because in it one approaches a text without personal preconceptions in order to allow a text to say "what God put there."<sup>15</sup> Williams contrasts his "Inductive" approach with a "Deductive" one. "Deductive" Bible study, he contends, occurs when one approaches a text with preconceived ideas about a text and attempts to learn from a text what one believes is already there. In other words, Williams wishes to have persons truly learn from the Bible and not just go through the motions.

Williams' approach is designed for any number of lay persons, divided into any number of small groups. These individuals, in their groups, answer specific questions of a text which are designed to help uncover a text's meaning. Thus, by directly studying and encountering the text for themselves, the individual does most of the work and in turn

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<sup>14</sup>Don Williams, "Inductive Study of the New Testament" 2 tapes "Teaching on Tape" (Hollywood, CA, Vericom, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

learns the most in the process. The method basically involves two main activities. The first series of activities are the "Preliminary Steps" and consist of the following instructions:

1. Read the whole text and write a title heading for each major division of the Scripture.

2. Reconstruct the historical situation of the text by:

a. Finding out all that is possible about the characters in the story, by recording everything one can find out about each character.

b. Determine the situation out of which the text emerged, by summarizing the role of each character.

c. Determine the reason the text was written.

The second major division in the method is for each participant to answer as best he or she can each of six "Inductive Questions". They are:

1. Historical - What was the setting and content?  
Who is speaking or acting?  
What is being said or taught?  
When is it happening?

2. Language - What language is used, form or sentence structure (is it prose, poetry, hymn, etc.)?  
How is it being said?  
Why are the particular words chosen?  
What is the meaning of the words?

3. Theological - Points made about the nature of God, man, sin, salvation, the Christian life.  
What is the theological meaning of a text?

4. Tactics or      Why is what is being said, being  
Strategy            said?  
                      How is the author making his point?
5. Contemporary -How do you apply the text to our  
                      world?  
                      Government, Politics, Economics,  
                      Sociology, Psychology, Education.
6. Personal -     How the text applies to your life--  
                      Personality, Needs, Goals,  
                      Relationships, Decisions.

This method of study is clearly concerned with the historical issues of a text and allows persons to discover the text's meaning on their own as opposed to depending on an "expert." In addition, the model also deals with more than strictly historical issues, and asks the participants to make a contemporary application and interpretation of the text to their own lives. The strength of the method is that it allows persons to be directly involved in their own learning. The model is basically a carefully structured method of exegesis that appears to be easily assimilated by the average Church member. One possible weakness of the model is that it seems inadequate to deal with any textual problems, other than those on the surface. It is dependent on what the text itself says, and does not allow an opportunity to adequately explore such issues as author, time of writing, theological perspective or use of symbolism. The model is certainly sensitive to these issues, but appears to need a more adequate way of dealing with subtle but important critical problems. It would seem however,

that in its teaching persons how to do their own exegesis, it is on the right track and its strengths far outnumber its weaknesses.

*The Dialectical Model of Walter Wink*

As we would recall, Walter Wink sees the value and necessity of historical critical study but is equally sensitive to the necessity of putting historical biblical criticism under the "management" of an adequate existential interpretation, which enables human transformation. For his model, Wink acknowledges the influence of the Guild for Psychological Studies of San Francisco and its leaders, Dr. Elizabeth B. Howes and Sheila Moon.<sup>16</sup> The method Wink employs is that of a "Socratic Dialogue." This is where a leader carefully guides a group into a series of questions based on his or her own previous exegesis of a text. The following is condensed from the example Wink gives in his work.<sup>17</sup>

Wink proposes three levels of questioning, the first of which centers in and around a historical analysis of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Elizabeth B. Howes, "Analytic Psychology and the Synoptic Gospels" in *Intersection and Beyond* (1971), p. 152. (Available from the Guild for Psychological Studies, 2230 Divisadero Street, San Francisco, CA 94115), and E.B. Howes and S. Moon, *Man the Choicemaker* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Wink, pp. 52-60.

passage and a comparison with Gospel parallels. Such questions as the following might be asked when studying the healing of the paralytic (Mt 9:1-8, Mk 2:1-12, Lk 5:17-26). How does Matthew's account differ from that in Mark? In Luke? How do you account for the differences? Why does Matthew not explain the charge of blasphemy? What appears to be the earliest source? The second level of questioning moves more deeply into the passage. Try now to picture this scene as it is described in Mark. For what purpose do the four friends bring the paralytic to Jesus? What do they do when they can't reach Jesus? What did Jesus "see", which he identifies as faith? What evidence is there as to the attitude of the paralytic himself? Why does Jesus speak of forgiveness? Does Jesus forgive him? How do the scribes hear him? What is meant by "which is easier"? Who is the Son of Man? The third level of questioning moves into the area of personal contemporary life. It allows the passage to resonate in the person, it introjects the meaning of the passage into one's own existence and one's own self-understanding. Wink suggested the following questions: Who is the "paralytic" in you? What aspect of ourselves does this character resonate, if any? Who is the scribe in you? Why doesn't the "scribe" want the "paralytic" healed - both in you and in the story? What is the relationship between the "scribe" and the "paralytic"? Who are the four helpers? What resources are available to bring us to the healing

value? What would it be like to marshall your paralytic and helpers to move to the healing source? Isn't that what the story is really about? Wink ends his example with the instructions for each member to take home some modeling clay and "model your paralytic or scribe" in light of the discussion and bring it with him or her to the next session.

Wink's model is valuable in that it meaningfully involves each group member with the passage being studied at three, progressively more personal levels. He fully incorporates historical critical insights, along with a variety of psycho-sociological ones. Wink's model is more dependent on the insights of the group leader than the "Inductive" approach just studied. With Wink, less time is spent on historical critical matters, but more on the personal-psychological ones. The models of both Wink and Williams agree in theory on the importance of historical criticism, but Wink's model has more emphasis on personal interpretation than does Williams' model. Though Wink does not include any experiential group exercises, he is moving in that direction when he employs the clay modeling exercise. Wink's dialogical method seems to hold great promise.

*"Switched on Scripture"*

"Switched on Scripture" by Dennis Benson,<sup>18</sup> is a set of six tape cassettes designed for use by group leaders with a six-week Bible study group. Each cassette focuses on one book, passage, or passages from the Bible. Benson calls his approach an "experiential study of Scriptures." Each tape presents a series of numbered "voice tracks" which consist of a short series of statements, comedy skits, music, monologues, etc. to which the study group then reacts (after turning off the tape).

For example, tape #4 is a study of passages taken from I John. The opening voice track, based on I John 1-4 has a series of nine statements made by persons replying to the question: "What is the most important thing in your life?" After listening, the leader's guide (provided with each tape), suggests the listener to make a multimedia experience expressing contemporary joy. Voice track two is a conversation of two boys about the idea that God is love. The leader's guide asks the group to react to the discussion. Track three has a boy talking about how Jesus started with love and has now been reduced to plastic statues by our culture. The group is then to discuss the pros and cons of organized religion. Track four is the

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<sup>18</sup>Dennis Benson, "Yin Yang: an Experiential Study of Selections from the Book of 1 John", "Switched On Scripture", tape IV (Nashville: Abingdon Audio Graphics, 1971).

statement of a man who says that ads are put on buses so that people won't have to look at other people's eyes. The group is then directed to break into dyads and look into one person's eyes and see what you find there. It should be said that Benson is careful to only suggest possible experiences that could be used, after each voice track, and never insists something must be used. He is aware that every group has different needs and he encourages leaders to know their group and creatively structure exercises for that particular group.

"Switched On Scripture" can be a very valuable resource for teachers and groups. Benson fully explains the design in advance on each tape, suggesting different ways it can be used. The leader's guide is clear and lists many very creative exercises for group use. The strength of "Switched On Scripture" is its experiential focus on Bible study. In a very creative way, it provides a variety of interesting ways the theme of a biblical passage can be dealt with on a contemporary level using experiential methods. It, therefore, provides the opportunity for groups to seriously grapple with the existential meaning of a text, by applying it to their own lives. Learning about the text's meaning actually takes place in the guided experience, by putting the text in contemporary terms. Benson does have some concern for historical issues and encourages group leaders to consult any and all literature which can

give them insight into the historical and theological background of the text(s) being studied. However, in the design itself, there is no discussion of historical issues or problems. The most the group is asked to do is to read the passages, book or text and to write down key words that are found. Again, the "Switched On Scripture" series is very valuable in making the Bible exciting and contemporary, but it is very weak in its lack of historical background of the Scripture involved.

#### *Serendipity Books*

*Serendipity Books* are a series of (at present 15) volumes authored by Lyman Coleman.<sup>19</sup> Each book typically consists of an outline, an overview of the book, instructions for leaders, and a variety of exercises for use with a personal growth group program. Books are on different themes. Topics include a course on creative expression, Christian communication, personal awareness, personal relationships, mission outreach, Christian liberation, Christian lifestyle, filmmaking, how to run a coffee house, self-discovery, family relationships, and discovering God's call. Designs are usually for six week study groups or for weekend experiences with family groups, Bible study groups,

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<sup>19</sup> Lyman Coleman, *Groups in Action*, (Serendipity Books) (Waco, TX: Word, 1971).

fellowship groups or care groups. Nearly every volume contains exercises based on Scripture. These, Coleman calls "Relational" and "Inductive" Bible study. "Relational" Bible study is designed to help persons "relate" the Scripture to their own lives. In the volume, *Groups in Action*,<sup>20</sup> the opening session of "Relational Bible study" of Acts 2:42-47, begins in the following way. Each person is asked to read the passage and is told that it describes the early Christian community immediately following Pentecost. As they read, they are to let their imaginations recreate the setting of the passage and its meaning for their lives. They were then asked to fill out the following questionnaire:

1. My first impression when I read this passage might be described by the word
  - a. ho-hum
  - b. ouch
  - c. wow
  - d. right on
  - e. whoopee
2. If I had been living in Jerusalem during this period, the thing that would impress me about the Christian community described in this passage would be (rank "1", "2", "3", etc. in order of significance for you):
  - a. the apparent joy in their lives
  - b. the miracles they performed
  - c. the way they shared their possessions
  - d. the close relationship with each other
  - e. the daily increase in their number
3. The difference between the Christian community described in the passage and the Christian community of today, is due to the fact that:
  - a. we don't need each other
  - b. we don't know each other's needs
  - c. we don't want to know each other's needs

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-39.

- d. we don't want others to know our needs
- e. we don't take the time to know each other deeply
- f. we don't get to know each other deeply, in the time we spend together

After answering these questions, persons are instructed to share their answers and explain their reasons behind them. Persons then answer a second phase of questions that deal with their own experience of Christian community.

In the same volume under the "Inductive Bible study" section, persons read a passage putting a mark after each verse signifying whether they understood it, were confused by it, were inspired, or were convicted about something in their lives. They are then directed to choose two verses that really speak to them and then rewrite those verses in their own words. They then answer certain questions about the passage. For Hebrews 10:23, they are to answer:

1. What kind of people make it easy for you to open up and be yourself?
2. What group have you been in recently that really "enabled" you?
3. If you had to evaluate your present group by the standards of "love and active goodness", would the group pass or fail?
4. What will it take for you to get moving spiritually?

Group members then share their paraphrases and answers to these questions in small groups.

Both the example of "Relational Bible study" and "Inductive Bible study" are fairly indicative of how the

Scripture is studied in each of the *Serendipity Books*. The emphasis of his technique centers on personal feelings and existential meaning of the passage. There is little or no concern about historical critical insights. Coleman appears to be far more concerned in his series about human transformation than he is about study of the meanings, but does not give the group member the opportunity to really study the passage. Coleman's emphasis, it would appear, is on giving only the opportunity to really study oneself. Of course, this is not to say that the participant is not studying and applying the central meaning of Scripture to his life. No doubt Coleman does center discussion in and around authentic Scriptural truth, but he offers no opportunities for the group members to determine or discover the Bible's message on their own. The participant is dependent on Coleman's interpretation. In his failure to include any historical study, he is not allowing a Scripture to disclose any meaning other than that which he sees. No doubt Coleman is aware of the limitations of his approach and one must realize that his real purpose is to further human transformation and renewal. For this, the *Serendipity Books* are quite valuable resources for exploration of personal self-understanding. They are quite creative and useful for doing the hermeneutic task of making the Bible contemporary, but they are not true Bible study.

The previous review of some contemporary Bible study methods suggests a variety of styles and techniques. Either the "Inductive" study of Don Williams or the Socratic dialogue used by Walter Wink, offers two ways a group may creatively deal with historical critical issues. The models of "Switched On Scripture" or the *Serendipity Books* present a variety of ways persons can ingeniously and meaningfully understand and apply biblical insights to their own lives.

The exercises presented are especially valuable for learning through personal experience. Through the guided exercises, the person profoundly sees what he or she believes about him or herself. Persons see how they actually live their lives and how they relate to others. These exercises provide a very meaningful way which allows persons to encounter the biblical truths. Conscious of the need for both historical study and existential study, and aware of some techniques used to teach both levels of study, we are now in the position to develop a sample of a dialogic model of Bible study. That design will be presented in Chapter IV.. Before that can be developed, however, we must carefully examine the passage selected for study, the Raising of Lazarus story found in John 11:1-44. The reasons for selecting this passage will become clear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III  
THE RAISING OF LAZARUS  
EXEGESIS: JOHN 11:1-44

There are many reasons for selecting the Lazarus story from the Gospel of John. John was selected for study as much for what it is not as it was for what it is. The Gospel of John, like the synoptic gospels, is not a historical record of the event of Jesus' life. But, by selecting the Lazarus story from John, a Bible study group will not need to wrestle with the issue whether the raising of Lazarus story is an authentic saying or incident in the life of the historical Jesus. The point maintained is that a viable working model of Bible study can be flexible and can study *any* Scripture in the Bible. It need not, as some studies do, concentrate only on the parables or on the life of Jesus of Nazareth. A passage from the Gospel of John provides a very beautiful and dynamic portrayal of Jesus Christ. It is more of a dramatic and artistic representation of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and not limited to a historical picture of Jesus. John is imaginative in his use of imagery and symbolism, something persons need to appreciate and value today as a piece of great Christian literature. John is concerned with theology and Christology, more than with history and he colorfully paints a picture of Jesus as the resurrection and the life. As Colwell and

Titus have said:

For the Fourth Gospel writer Jesus does not merely teach idealism: he is light. Jesus is no mere advocate of moral integrity: he is truth. Jesus does not offer a new ethical code: he is *the way*. Jesus does not offer to men an ethical road to life: he *is life.*<sup>1</sup>

In an age which lacks clear "authorities," the Gospel of John clearly speaks to us with Jesus as the ultimate authority bringing "life" to us all. The Raising of Lazarus story was selected because it powerfully and beautifully conveys Jesus Christ's power for changing lives. As will be seen, it examines the meaning of life, death and Christian rebirth.

The story of Lazarus (without parallel in the Synoptics) includes a sign but no discourse. The sign is set in the wider context of verses 1-44. The story of the Raising of Lazarus begins with an introduction (verse 1 and 2) of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. The character of Lazarus is found only in the Synoptics in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The point of this parable was to show that even if one were to rise from the dead, the Jews would not believe.<sup>2</sup> Since the Gospel writer probably knew of Luke,<sup>3</sup> it seems likely that Luke 16:19f. was a source for the Lazarus story since there is no synoptic

<sup>1</sup>Ernest C. Colwell and Eric L. Titus, *The Gosepl of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The Gosepl According to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965).

parallel to John's raising of Lazarus. Colwell and Titus suggest the writer of John<sup>4</sup> probably imposed the figure of Lazarus upon the sisters Mary and Martha, found in Luke 10, to give Lazarus a historical reference.<sup>5</sup> While Jesus is a friend of Lazarus, he is certainly not the beloved disciple.<sup>6</sup> For John, the raising of Lazarus is the greatest sign in the Gospel. It brings an end to Jesus' earthly ministry and precedes the process which leads to Jesus' crucifixion. It is probable then that John took the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, had Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, and thus showed Jesus as the resurrection and the life.<sup>7</sup> But even this greatest sign fails to convince the Jews.

In verse three, Jesus learns that Lazarus is ill and in verse four, Jesus tells his disciples that the illness is not for death but for revealing God's glory (not for God's glorification)<sup>8</sup> which is manifested in the Son. Lazarus' illness will provide God the opportunity for glorifying Jesus. In verse six, Jesus delays his visit for an unstated reason. As verse five makes clear, it is not for

<sup>4</sup>The date and authorship of the Gospel of John is ambiguous and controversial. Barrett places the time of writing between 80-140 A.D. The writer is unknown, not an eyewitness to Jesus, and certainly not the disciple John of Zebedee, cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 105ff.

<sup>5</sup>Colwell and Titus, p. 46. <sup>6</sup>Barrett, pp. 323-4.

<sup>7</sup>Colwell and Titus, p. 47. <sup>8</sup>Barrett, p. 324.

the lack of affection. Here the probable allusion is to Christ's future death and the theme for John that the hour "has not yet come."<sup>9</sup> In verses seven to ten Jesus intentionally decides to go into Judea over the protests of the disciples. As verses nine and ten made clear, Jesus was aware of the fateful outcome of that decision. The "hour" is drawing near, time is running out for doing God's work. John speaks here of Jesus as the light by which men walk. In verse eleven, Jesus speaks of his intention to raise Lazarus from the dead where *philos* may be a symbol for a Christian.<sup>10</sup> The disciples misunderstand Jesus (lack of faith for John?) in verse twelve. John explains this in verse thirteen. Jesus clarifies that Lazarus is dead in verse fourteen and explains that he chose not to go to Lazarus so that the disciples' faith could be strengthened when Jesus resurrected Lazarus (verses 43-44). Thomas' remark to go and be with Jesus, in verse sixteen, indicates the disciples' acceptance of the true destiny of Jesus in Judea.<sup>11</sup> Also, dying with Christ will later become the characteristic mark of Christian discipleship.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup>Barrett, p. 326.

<sup>11</sup>Bultmann, p. 400, Barrett, p. 327.

<sup>12</sup>Barrett, p. 328.

The statement that Lazarus had been dead for four days in verse 17 probably refers to the popular Jewish belief that the soul departs from the dead on the fourth day. Thus, all hope of reviving Lazarus is gone - he is really dead.<sup>13</sup> The geographical reference in verse 18 draws attention to the fact that Jerusalem is near. This justifies the presence of the Jews in verses 18 and 19. Barrett<sup>14</sup> made clear that the good intentions and sincerity of the Jews should not be doubted in verse 19, since the custom of consoling the bereaved was prevalent in Judaism. Martha's coming to Jesus in verse 20 introduces a key phrase in verse 21. Here Martha states her faith in Jesus, that he could prevent death. Martha's faith is more fully extended in verse 22. Even now, life may be restored through Jesus by God. Jesus then speaks to Martha of the future raising of Lazarus and sets in motion the conversation which follows on Jesus' christological significance.<sup>15</sup> Martha's statement in verse 24 was common knowledge and does not refer directly to Jesus, but to the common Jewish belief (which John shares) in the resurrection of the dead at the last day.<sup>16</sup> Verses 25 and 26 clarify Jesus' significance

<sup>13</sup>Bultmann, p. 400, Barrett, p. 335.

<sup>14</sup>Barrett, p. 328.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

for resurrection, Jesus not only brings life, he *is* the resurrection and life for John. Faith in Jesus promotes an anticipation of the future resurrection. The hour is coming now. Resurrection for Christians has presently begun through Christ and will be completed at the last day. There is no resurrection or life outside of Jesus. Christian death will be followed by life. Jesus is the realization of eternal life and the raising of Lazarus will manifest this truth. Raymond E. Brown<sup>17</sup> notes the ambiguity in the reference to life in verses 25 and 26. Bultmann and others maintain that verse 26 refers to physical life. Bernard and others maintain that verse refers to spiritual or eternal life. The meaning would thus be: verse 25: "The believer, if he dies physically, will live spiritually."<sup>18</sup> Verse 26: "The believer who is alive spiritually will never die spiritually."<sup>19</sup> Brown agrees with Bernard over against the Bultmann view. Martha again affirms her faith in Jesus (verse 27) but does not affirm that Lazarus will walk from the tomb. Her faith is incomplete.

Verses 28f. lead up to the event of Lazarus' raising. Martha summons Mary for an unknown reason (verse 28), Mary comes expectantly to Jesus (verse 29). Barrett<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), I, 425.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, p. 331.

notes that the idea of coming to Jesus is an important idea in John. Jesus does not go into the village for an unknown reason (verse 30). Mary and the Jews who were consoling her, leave the house for the tomb (verse 31). On the way they meet Jesus. Because Mary and the Jews show a lack of faith in Jesus by crying instead of believing Jesus could raise Lazarus, Jesus is angered and deeply disturbed in verse 33. It is revealing how the English translators translate ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραχεν ἑαυτόν.

*The Revised Standard Version* gives "deeply moved in Spirit and troubled;" *The New English Bible* has "he sighed heavily and was deeply moved;" *The King James Version* reads "he groaned in the spirit and was troubled." Of special interest is *Good News for Modern Man* which has "his heart was touched and he was deeply moved." These English translations have no trace of anger in Jesus' voice, probably reflecting the rather pious belief that 1) divine beings always have everything under control, or that 2) divine beings aren't subject to human emotion.<sup>21</sup>

Returning to verse 33, Jesus is practically forced to perform a miracle (another cause for anger as Barrett sees it) and Jesus is aware of the ramifications of this miracle - his death will be certain. Bultmann<sup>22</sup> pointed out that this lack of faith was also symbolic of the picture of faithless persons who do not understand the redeemer

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<sup>21</sup>Barrett, p. 333.

<sup>22</sup>Bultmann, p. 406.

as resurrection and life. Jesus thus proceeds to perform the sign. He asks for the place of burial and they lead him there (verse 34). Jesus weeps in verse 35, as Jesus senses Mary's and the Jews' situation. Jesus was moved by Lazarus' situation, the Jews' lack of faith, and Mary and Martha's sadness. Jesus' weeping motivates the Jews to comment on Jesus' great affection for Lazarus. They still miss the point: Lazarus will be raised. The Jews do not sense Jesus' frustration with them. Again in verse 37, the Jews have the wrong faith. They believe Jesus can heal and even perhaps restore life, but they doubt that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>23</sup> Again in verse 38, Jesus is angered over the partial faith of the others (not complete lack of faith).<sup>24</sup> Jesus comes to the tomb and says to remove the stone (verse 39). Martha cautions Jesus because of the decaying smell. Again, the point John makes is that Lazarus is really dead. Martha's lack of faith is still evident. Jesus answers her (verse 40) with the statement that raising the dead is no less than a manifestation of God.<sup>25</sup> Jesus then prays (verse 41-42) and the narrative emphasizes the point that it is not Jesus' power, but the power of God that is at work. No moment of prayer is indicated, but

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<sup>23</sup>Barrett, p. 334. <sup>24</sup>Ibid. <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

constant communion between Jesus and God is implied. Jesus is not a magician or supernatural being; Jesus has no authority outside of God.<sup>26</sup> Because of God's power granted to Jesus, he can raise Lazarus. The Christological implications are tremendous here. Jesus then calls Lazarus out (verse 43), and he comes out bound in cloth, yet walking (verse 44). The scene ends with no elaboration. As a result of this action, the Pharisees plot Jesus' death as was expected (verse 45f.).

#### CONCLUSIONS

It can be seen that the raising of Lazarus is less a story about Lazarus than about Jesus, and the promise of life given to believers. Through Christ, the faithful will have present life. For the Christians, resurrection has begun in Jesus. As Barrett puts it: "The pattern of life of all Christians is determined from the movement from death to life experienced by Lazarus." The final resurrection will come in the last day, even for the dead. It is clear in these passages of the text that it is stressed that Jesus' power comes only from God. Jesus draws attention to God and away from himself.

An important interplay in the text is between Jesus and those who have only partial faith. Both Martha

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

and Mary have faith in Jesus, but it is not complete. They believe Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death, but did not believe Jesus could restore life. The Jews also are symbolic of partial faith. They believe Jesus can heal and perhaps restore life, but this is from Jesus' own power. They don't believe Jesus is the Son of God. The Jews were no doubt symbolic of all Judaism, and this final sign is the last proof of who Jesus was. Yet they still don't believe. Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life for Christians. John's dramatic sign shows the tragedy and scandal created by the Jews' unbelief. It should be remembered, however, that Christ was crucified but also glorified on the cross for the writer of John.

The raising of Lazarus story contains a few important issues. On one level, the story is about belief as opposed to unbelief. Unbelief leads to death, belief leads to life. The discussion deals with life and death on two levels. It speaks of physical life and death, as well as spiritual life and death. In John both levels are combined. Both physical and spiritual life is made possible through Christ. On another level, the story is about life in the present as opposed to future eternal life. Again, both are granted through belief in Christ. There is rebirth to new life in the present, as well as a promise of future life at the day of judgment. This is probably a product of John's belief in "realized eschatology." Considering the great

emphasis on the future life, promised in the "New Age" that dominated Christian thought before the Gospel of John was written, John's emphasis on the possibility of present life takes on added significance. Additional issues will be clarified in the retreat design, presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

## A DIALOGICAL RETREAT DESIGN

## PRESUPPOSITIONS

Thus far, considerations for developing a dialogical model of Bible study have been given primarily on a theoretical level. The results of the previous discussion suggest that any viable Bible study model needs to fully incorporate the dimensions of both historical critical study, as well as contemporary existential interpretation. It has further been suggested that exercises which are experiential in nature, that is, which allow for learning to proceed from one's own personal experience, offer an excellent means for making biblical meaning contemporary. The use of such exercises, along with historical study, allow for the integration of both experiential and historical aspects in the same design. Each needs and clarifies the other, and should not be studied in isolation.

The decision to use a weekend retreat format, however, requires additional justification. A weekend retreat has unique advantages over a study series, merely consisting of two-hour weekly sessions over a six to eight week period. While the total time spent for study may be similar to a weekend, a weekend retreat offers the added advantage of utilizing large blocks of time for study time, which is

needed for thorough study of any Scripture. A weekend also provides the setting where a group spirit can develop. The group can become something more than merely an aggregate of individuals, it can become a community of caring. Only in such an atmosphere of living, studying and playing together can persons overcome the typical fears of encountering other persons at a deep and meaningful level. Since persons relax their defenses only when there is a degree of fundamental trust existing between persons, it would seem that a weekend retreat setting, away from the participants' daily routine and pressures, would provide the best environment for trust to develop. The use of small study groups also allows for trust to develop quickly and naturally. In such groups, persons have the greatest opportunity for encountering others and for building relationships of trust. For these reasons, then, the retreat proposal will use small groups extensively.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For additional information on the value, theory and practice of small groups see: Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *The People Dynamic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), and Robert C. Leslie, *Sharing Groups in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970).

## AN EXAMPLE OF A DIALOGICAL RETREAT DESIGN

*Friday Evening*

The assumption is made that a weekend retreat will usually begin Friday evening and continue until Sunday noon. Friday evening should be spent in group building, helping to form a "community" from a number of individuals. It has been the author's experience that this initial time together is very important and will set the tone for the entire experience. Time should be spent in activities which will acquaint the participants with one another and help break the tension that exists when any new group of persons is formed. It is also appropriate for the group leader to spend time briefing the group on the retreat facilities and the following day's activities.

There are several references currently published which provide games and exercises which help in the initial group formation process. Three works which have proven useful are: *A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training* by Pfeiffer and Jones (in five volumes),<sup>2</sup> *Growth Games* by Lewis Streifeld,<sup>3</sup> and *Serendipity Books* by

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<sup>2</sup>J. William Pfeiffer and John E. Jones, *A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training* (5 vols., rev. ed; La Jolla, CA: University Associates, 1969-75).

<sup>3</sup>Howard Lewis and Harold Streifeld, *Growth Games* (New York: Bantam, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Lyman Coleman. Examples of the type of activities which might be employed are the following:

Make nametags out of paper which "expresses some part of you". Share that nametag with someone else. Then each introduces the other.

Play the party game where the names of famous persons, or biblical characters, are pinned on the backs of each person. The task of each person is to guess "who they are" by asking other members questions (others may answer with a yes or no).

Play a concentration game where each person in a group (in a circle) speaks his or her name and then says something "important about him/herself. The person sitting next to the previous person must remember the last person's name and "important thing" and then says his or her name and "important thing." The process moves about the circled group, with each person remembering all the previous names and important things about the other persons.

Participants might share interesting things about themselves such as: What is your favorite time of year, and why? What is your favorite time of day, and why? What is your favorite spot in the house, and why? <sup>5</sup>

After such exercises, the evening might close with singing, dancing or a group prayer. Light refreshments might also be served.

### *Saturday*

8:00- 9:00 A.M. Breakfast

9:00-11:30 A.M. First session of "Inductive" study on  
John 11:1-27.

<sup>4</sup> Lyman Coleman, *Serendipity Books* (15 vols., Waco, TX: Word, Serendipity House, 1968-1975).

<sup>5</sup> Selected from Lyman Coleman, *Serendipity "Frog-Kissin'" Workshops* (Waco, TX: Serendipity House, 1974).

The first session will begin with a historical study of John 11:1-27 based on the "Inductive" model developed by Don Williams.<sup>6</sup> The group leader should begin this session with an introduction to the morning's activities. Following the introduction, groups of four to six persons should be formed. Each person should then read John 11:1-27 and write a summary sentence describing the action in each paragraph of the text. The group leader should emphasize that only a very general statement should be made for these large sections of Scripture. Caution persons not to analyze the action of each verse, since this will be done next. Allow no more than ten minutes for this first task.

Next, have each person divide a piece of paper (approx. 11"x14") into columns. Tell the participants to write, in each column, the names of the characters in the story. In this case, they would be: The Disciples, Jesus, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, the Jews and one column for the narrator of the Lazarus story.

Tell each person to re-read the story and describe, verse by verse, the activity of each character. In some cases there will be more than one character in a single verse. In such cases, a description will be made in the

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<sup>6</sup>See Chapter II under "Current Bible Study Methods"

column under each of the characters. Thus, it might be that under "Jesus" one would write, "Jesus speaks to the Disciples" and under "Disciples", "The Disciples listen to Jesus." The leader should make clear that persons should only describe the *action* taking place and *not* to analyze the meaning or implications of the action. Again, questions of meaning will be dealt with in the next step. Allow about 30 minutes for this task. After completion, there should be a general group discussion of the responses.

For the first step in the "Inductive" method, persons should re-group into the same small groups as before and ask the four inductive questions that were presented earlier.<sup>7</sup> Those questions deal with aspects of history, language, theology and the author's tactics. Have the group study the text with these questions in mind. The group leader should allow about 20-30 minutes for this exercise and then again as a group discuss their questions and discoveries. It is here where the group leader should be able to act as a resource person, as well as discussion facilitator, and should be familiar with the exegesis of the Lazarus story in Chapter III. After this discussion, the group should break for lunch.

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<sup>7</sup> For a description, see the preceding discussion in Chapter II under "Current Bible Study Methods."

11:30- 1:00 P.M. Lunch break

1:00- 3:00 P.M. Experiential learning

In the afternoon session, the group will deal with the implications of the Scripture for their own lives. The leader should introduce the session and elaborate on the contemporary issues which the Scripture deals with. The group leader should facilitate the transition from what is taking place in the Scripture to what it can mean on an existential level. For example, the dialogue between Jesus and Martha provides rich discussion material on faith and lack of faith. It illuminates the problem faced by all persons, namely what to ultimately believe in. Martha seems to possess some faith but lacks complete faith. On an existential level, one might say that Martha did not fully trust God, but trusted instead religious dogma and the finality of death. In existential terms, the problem might be seen in how we put our trust and faith in false authorities. We prefer to believe in that which we see or fear; we put our trust in human organizations such as the nation, legal systems, and religious institutions, instead of trusting God. On another level, we do not trust in the life that Jesus promises, we fear life instead of living it. To keep life safe and secure, we put limits on how we live and on our human relationships. We only live within a small margin of our own potential for living.

To enable persons to deal with such issues in their own lives, on an easily understood level, the group might deal with the meaning of the organized Church on the one hand and how they limit their own lives and significant relationships on the other. The following exercises are designed to explore these questions in an experiential way.

The group leader could first read aloud "Sheriff/Scout" by Wes Seeliger,<sup>8</sup> a poetic essay on the author's view of "what Christianity really is" as opposed to "what many people think it is."

Then the leader could ask the participants to divide into groups of six to eight persons. In each group, the members would nonverbally pass around a paper cup with the instructions: "Do to this cup what you would like to do to the organized Church."<sup>9</sup> After each person has finished, each person could share why they did what they did and how they feel about the organized Church.

To experience how persons limit their personal relationships (and therefore their lives) use this exercise. Give each person some paper and a pencil and ask them to divide the paper into two columns. Label the first column "How I limit this relationship" and label the second column

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<sup>8</sup>Wes Seeliger, "Sheriff/Scout," in Mark Link (ed.) *He Is the Still Point of the Turning World* (Chicago: Argus, 1971).

<sup>9</sup>Coleman, Serendipity "Frog-Kissin'" Workshops (Waco, TX: Serendipity House, 1974), p. 26.

"How the other limits this relationship." Then have each person think of someone "significant" to their life and list the limitations perceived in this relationship with that person. The group should be told that they may use a pseudo name if they wish, to protect the other person's privacy. Each person would then share their lists.

Following these exercises, a general group discussion might be held on these topics. The group leader could also have the group verbalize what the Scripture has to say, in relation to these topics.

3:00- 5:30 P.M. Free time

Up until now, the group members have probably been working hard and they need time for relaxation and informal fellowship.

5:30- 7:00 P.M. Dinner

7:00- 9:00 P.M. "Inductive" Bible study--Part II on  
John 11:28-44.

The evening should be spent studying the remaining verses (28-44) in John's account of the raising of Lazarus. The same method should be followed, as was used in the morning session. The evening session might close with refreshments and singing.

*Sunday Morning*

8:00- 9:00 A.M. Breakfast

9:00-11:00 A.M. Experiential learning

The closing verses clearly show that Jesus possesses the power which enables rebirth to occur in all Christians in the present life (as well as for the future resurrection). It is appropriate then for the group to focus on the nature and meaning of this rebirth process. For example, the group might deal with how persons can stay on the growing edge of life. Possible exercises on this theme might be as follows.

To allow participants to experience what it would be like to live without the limitations they impose or are imposed on them by others, the group leader could guide the group through a fantasy like the following one. The leader should slowly read the following:

"Close your eyes and get comfortable. Become aware of the tension in your legs, your neck, your shoulders, and your stomach. Relax any tension you feel. Be aware of your breathing and the rhythm you experience. Breathe deeply and try to gradually expand your breathing, so you feel it in all your body. See if you can feel your breathing in your finger-tips. (Pause.) Now imagine you are somewhere you like to be. On the horizon, you see someone walking towards you. The person comes closer and closer until you recognize him or her as the person you thought of in yesterday's exercise. But now you realize something is different--all the limitations in your relationship with this person are gone. You are free to relate to this person as you really want to. The person now comes next to you and you begin a conversation. Talk with this person and be aware of how it feels to relate to this person in this new way. (Long pause.) After a while the person has to

leave. Say good-bye to this person, and express in some way how you feel about him or her right now. The other person then walks away, and you are alone again. When you are ready, come back into the here and now and open your eyes."

After the fantasy, have persons break up into dyads and share their experiences. Have persons concentrate on how it felt to be in this new relationship.

Persons could be given the opportunity to deal with their fears and feelings of mistrust, by allowing them to risk trusting others in a "trust circle." The leader should ask for volunteers from the whole group. Those not wishing to take part actively can take part by being observers. Have the participants stand and form a close circle. Have one person go to the center of the circle, and with arms folded, close his or her eyes. Then instruct the person to let him/herself fall into the arms of the group members standing around. The group then gently passes the person around the circle. When the person wants to stop, have another person go into the center. Continue this until the entire group has had an opportunity to be in the center.

After this experience, the participants and the observers should then share their feelings and observations. Allow participants to share how it felt to catch and be caught by others. Observers can share what they perceived happening in the trust circle. The group should then discuss the reasons why they had feelings of trust or mistrust. The groups should discuss what they were afraid of.

**11:00-12:00 A.M. Worship experience**

An informal worship experience can close the weekend in a meaningful way. The time could profitably be spent using the traditional forms of worship, such as prayer, singing, and communion. The Lazarus story could again provide a springboard to a meditation or a group discussion on the role of Jesus Christ in a Christian's life. In addition to traditional worship forms, the group could engage in a "commissioning" experience. Each person would verbalize some new commitment they would like to make. Persons could also verbalize what strengths they see in other persons. This "strength bombardment" may take place in a small group of persons, where one person sits in the center of a circle and the persons seated around him or her verbalize the strength they see in that person. There is no limit to the possible worship forms employed and each leader should design the worship experience around the particular needs.

After the worship service, the group would normally clean up, eat lunch together, and leave. If time permits, an evaluation of the weekend could be very useful to the group leader and to the group as a whole. No retreat design is foolproof and improvements can always be made. In an effort to assess the value and strengths of the above design, a trial run was made with a condensed form of the design with a senior high youth group, over an intensive

ten-hour study period. The results of this experience are reviewed in the appendix.

**A P P E N D I X**

## DIALOGICAL RETREAT: TRIAL RUN

An abbreviated form of the retreat developed in this paper was used with a senior high group from a large urban Los Angeles Church. The group first met for dinner at the Church, then studied after dinner, slept overnight at the Church, and studied together again the following morning.

The design employed was shortened for the time limitations of the overnigher. An overnight experience was chosen, instead of a weekend retreat because it was felt that an overnight experience would provide an adequate test of the dialogical method proposed. Instead of spending the first evening of the retreat design "getting acquainted", only the first half hour was utilized for group building and for "breaking the ice," since the group members already knew one another. The group played fun concentration and relay games and then answered the questions, "What is your favorite month, time of day, and spot in the house, and why?"

The "Inductive" approach of Don Williams was employed for a historical study of John 11:1-27. The group leader introduced the method<sup>1</sup> and the persons began the tasks

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II "Current Bible Study Methods" under "Inductive Bible Study."

associated with that approach. All of the first evening together was devoted to this approach and closely followed the Saturday morning weekend retreat design.

Following breakfast the next morning, the group was guided into the experiential experience dealing with how persons limit their human relationships. Persons were asked to think of someone significant to their lives and to write down how both persons involved limit that relationship. The second session of Inductive study (on verses 28-44), immediately followed that exercise. Here again, William's model was closely followed. The group was then guided through the group fantasy presented earlier, which focused on living without self-imposed limitations.<sup>2</sup> After a discussion, a communion service was then held to close the group's time together. The group then evaluated the experience, by responding to questions of group atmosphere, leadership and the value of the various elements of the design.

The results of the evaluation suggested that most participants had a very good experience. Overall evaluations suggest strong group involvement, a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of learning a great deal about the Lazarus story, themselves, and others. The youth expressed

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<sup>2</sup>See Chapter IV "Weekend Retreat Design", Sunday Morning: Experiential Learning.

value in the group process and equally enjoyed the historical study using Williams' "Inductive" approach and the experiential exercises developed from the biblical themes.

Participants said that the "Inductive" approach helped them to slow down and concentrate on the characters and action in each verse. They saw things they would normally pass over in haste. Some said that it was essential before any higher understanding could have been achieved. Most enjoyed it. The only negative comment concerning the "Inductive" study was that it took up too much time. Indeed, one of the dangers in this method appears to be that unless the group leader is careful the approach takes a great deal of time. One mistake this leader made at the outset of the "Inductive" study was a failure to clearly distinguish between the first two steps of the method. The leader should be careful to make clear that only very general kinds of summary statements should be made for major blocks of verses. Do not allow persons to get preoccupied with the detail of each verse. Allow only about five to ten minutes for this initial task. Otherwise, persons will spend much too much time making summary statements. Such a devotion to detail comes in the second step where persons make columns for each of the major characters. Here also the leader should emphasize that persons should concentrate only on the *action* taking place and not on the intended meaning, theological or otherwise. This again can save

much needed time. Besides these criticisms, the method seems valuable for group use.

The group members had mixed reactions concerning the group exercises. All agreed that they were fun and helped them understand themselves and the other group members better. There was confusion, however, over the relation of the exercises to the passages. Some saw the exercises as profoundly related to the Lazarus story, but others saw little or no relationship to it. It is difficult to assess such divergent remarks. The least that can be said was that the transition from the Scripture to the here and now was ambiguous for some. This can be due to two factors. First, the leader was under the pressure of time because of the large amount of time inadvertently spent during the first night on the historical aspects. Secondly, the leader, because of the time element, made the transition from past to present too quickly and perhaps superficially. In his haste, he lost some persons. A weekend retreat would help alleviate the pressure of time, as would observing the cautions referred to in using the "Inductive" Bible study method.

In spite of the problems encountered, it must be said that all the group members were enthusiastic about the time spent together studying the Scripture. This in itself is a major accomplishment for any youth worker! If care is taken to avoid spending unnecessary time on the "Inductive"

approach, a design such as the above seems very promising. It did seem evident that the historical study employed did help persons discover new insights into the Scripture and their own lives. It also was clear that for some the group experiences helped clarify the Scripture ever further. The small group emphasis also provided a setting where fellowship could grow, which is another benefit of the design. In conclusion, the dialogical approach presented does seem to have great possibilities.

The dialogical approach certainly does have its problems, however, one of which is the time element. But such a problem makes clear that persons and even youth are especially eager to seriously learn and grapple with the Bible. Any method that "turns on" youth to the Bible, to the extent that time runs out before the people do, clearly shows promise.

The method even could be further improved by integrating more fully the historical and existential or experimental aspects. In both designs for the weekend and the overnighter, the historical aspects are studied first and then the existential. There is no need for such division. As was said earlier, the historical and experiential need each other and build upon one another. With an experienced leader, perhaps existential topics can emerge alongside historical ones and vice versa. The present separation is perhaps not ideal, but is useful in assuring that both

historical and existential will be studied in the same design. That, after all, is the intent of this paper.

The apparent success shown in this short trial of the dialogical model presented here may very well be saying to the Christian Church that a great awakening in the use and study of the Bible may be on the horizon. Perhaps with such an approach as this, which fully opens the Bible to both historical and existential avenues of study, the Bible may be awakened from its apparent slumber. Perhaps, with the help of such a strategy it can again be recognized as the center of the Christian faith, which in fact it is.

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